

May 2d, 1993

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Dear George Michael:

I am in recent receipt of your letter concerning the JFK assassination conference to be held at Providence, R.I., this June wherein you urged me to consider writing a paper based on a specified question: Has Harold Weisberg been a significant source of disinformation in the JFK assassination? Why?

I particularly noted the opportunity to have the paper published, which is a marvelous, truly worthy aspect of your conference. To produce the papers for publication must be extraordinarily tasking on you and your friends and associates--sweat, sweat, hours, & hours. I want to be notified when the publication appears and request information to that end.

You are correct in your preliminary statements that I have been researching the JFK assassination, lo these many years. My work in progress is on an investigation of the

Warren Commission's investigation into the murder, which joins as a sympathetic twin another manuscript in progress on the Warren Report as a historical document. These will be done or one will within a year, given no providential contingencies.

While I have spoken much and written many book reviews in recent months (read years) in addition to writing and research, this late summer I will be giving a paper on the assassination as a conspiracy to a Canadian session. I am currently focusing on the dimensions of that paper while struggling to complete the semester and tackle a few other issues that float in upon my life as an academe to trouble as it enriches it (as you well know). Time constraints are unbelievable.

I gave careful thought to your urging request. I must say no.

I wish to provide my reasons, but before doing state some of the sources I used in doing my considerations. I utilized original interviews, personal association with many of the major figures in the subject, correspondence, FOIA case documents, files of clippings and so forth garnered over 25 years as well as documentary collections in several libraries.

I think you will see why I see that the posed question contains an unexpressed contradiction in its premises.

First, as to Harold Weisberg's work-time spent on the assassination. From the very first moment of the assassination he went to work on the subject to produce the first critical book [Feb. 1965] and continued uninterruptably for the next thirty years with some slack coming into his efforts in the last few years with major surgeries and the infirmities of age [he is 80]. This effort included seven days a week for 20 years, a 18-20 hour per day work schedule [true]; he sleeps or slept 3-4 hours a night. He exhaustively read and prepared an annotated massive commentary on the 26 volumes (having read every word of its 10,000 pages) and also read every scrap of paper in the Warren Commission archives, including bookkeeping and publishing records, a feat no one to my knowledge has even attempted.

Weisberg is assisted like I regretfully am not by an exceptional eidetic memory, that until time a few years ago made its first inevitable enroads afforded him instant, total recall--that is of everything he ever read or heard he recalls.

His work also included extensive timely interviews of participants in Dallas and New Orleans. His Orleans work was

exceptional--including digging in the original records, interviews with many of the figures, and the development of a superior, truly superior understanding of the case developed by Garrison as well as the subject of significance--Oswald in New Orleans, (a completely different thing than Garrison's case) which only a fragment of his research was he able to get published in his book on the subject.

His work was plagued and hobbled by extreme poverty. He was always poor, a granite fact of life certainly incompatible with disinformation. At times he and his wife lived on food stamps and at at one time he had to ask for county aid in medical emergencies [he later paid the county back]. When he was in New Orleans for 30 days he lived on next to nothing, slept in an unused slave quarters hut on an estate providentially given to him to use by its eccentric owner, all he could afford on his Spartan budget was as I recall one hamburger and a 1/2 pint of milk each day--losing about 30 pounds. Some of his clothes were actually from the 1930s and picked up in sales and from friends. He knew by the way the price he paid for them, one shirt was 39 cents bought at a sale. He never begged and never made the lack of material things a factor in relationships if he could at all avoid it, e.g. a rich college student reading in Weisberg's extensive records once sneeringly derided him for not furnishing a better environment. Can you imagine?

George Michael you also recollect, I am certain, that his first book Whitewash could not find a publisher. Time and again editors would take it, rave about it, and then abruptly their owner/publishers would cancel it, sometimes after visits from the federals. 100 publishers turned it down, but not one adverse criticism did they make. Even with self-publishing he had problems, one printer actually ripping up the plates just before printing. He published against the odds with his own money--

In the mid-60s he often spoke extensively. At one critical period in San Francisco he spoke and debated and radio talk showed for 48 hours straight--splashing cold water in his face and standing up at the end to carry the argument against the supporters of the official findings. After a few hours sleep on that occasion he was flown to Los Angeles by a group associated with Maggie Fields and Bill O'Connell to pull Lane's fat out of the fire and fight Liebeler.

I use the Lane incident only to illustrate Weisberg's relationship to the critics over the years. I could use Epstein, Lifton, Groden, Ansam, Hurt, Donohue, and the rest.

Lane did not know the facts of the assassination and had terrible personal faults, and had in point of fact defamed Liebeler in irresponsible public lectures and statements. A

lawsuit threatened, which all concerned knew, [and every attorney consulted knew] Lane would not only lose but the critics would go down in flames with him, which would permanently damage the growing and increasingly focused dissenting community. Weisberg pulled it off and stopped Liebler cold. (Fields by the way grudgingly gave Weisberg only a cold ham sandwich for a late night snack, apparently expecting him to live on air.)

Lane's first book was apparently some part written by a committee, several members of which did not even know the subject matter as their correspondence embarrassingly and starkly attests; Lane cribbed from Whitewash and in his Citizen's Dissent stole even more. For his Los Angeles Free Press didoes he stole more. I know in my factual check of Lane's RTJ I counted hundreds of factual errors of all kinds, including much in the way of misquotations, but some of absolutely material fact that diminished the crime of the Commission and carefully exculpated the FBI. Once in New Orleans Lane would not debate me and cancelled out as he did when confronted with every subject matter specialist that I am aware of.

Time and again in those years Weisberg rallied campuses and the public through long talk radio shows with phenomenal success. In one he fought several New York attorneys specially prepared by opposition forces and salted in the

audience to crush him on air.

In addition to his work ethic, natural abilities, and poverty, another element to be noted is he often worked under exceptional conditions. From reading the original records I know for a fact that in the course of his work the CIA bugged his lectures and blocked his manuscripts from reaching Europe and even apparently domestic publishers; the FBI kept close and silent tabs on him, pressured people not to hire him for lectures, intercepted his manuscripts, and worked to discredit and defame him with many--for example, it deliberately lied to LBJ about his book and its arguments after LBJ had asked about it--or blocking reviews of the books; the Post Office monitored his mail; Maryland troopers staked out and watched his home; and occasionally several occurred at the same time.

Associated with this surveillance and interferences by the feds, Harold nonetheless filed over 100 FOIA suits on controversial subjects. When his money ran out and he could find no lawyer in America (even with money) to represent him, he filed them pro se. In some suits he charged the FBI, CIA, National Archives and assorted agencies and people with grievous acts, which in one or two instances if he lost he could have gone to jail. He proved his charges in court. Not one newspaper published one word on them. Among his accomplishments was the prying out of hundreds of thousands

of pages of files and absolutely key data on ballistics, film, witnesses, etc., regularly used today by critics as if heaven given and no reference to Harold's work. One FOIA case file alone contains, I think my memory is right on this, 5 linear feet of court records in the vicious skullduggery and battle that went on before right wing judges and corrupt officials, perjury, hearsay, threats by the court to him and Lesar, and again silence from the press.

He has extensive personal files [^{5 cases} ~~hundreds~~! of file drawers of records] open to individuals of every persuasion and personality of every ideological background and faith, whom he permits absolutely uncensored, unquestioned, and unsupervised access. And they are used extensively, by Tony Summers, Donohue, Hurt, et allia. For example, John Davis' worker labored for a year in his basement xeroxing away; this was work broken by school studies and other intermittent duties.

If asked a question by researchers he would respond, but only if asked. It is an amazing thing to read some recent books and find the knowledge taken from Harold's unattributed responses to certain key elements used in the text as the result of the authors own sleuthing.

When it came to tackling the books published by theorists on the assassination he was especially effective.

In all cases I am familiar with he only attacked where he had subject matter knowledge and knew as a fact what was what. You ought to see the full extent of what he did to Oliver Stone's JFK or to Lifton's whiskey dream, none of this underhanded or malacious by the way, but all above board and based on his exquisite research and unbelievable factual knowledge of the assassination, which is unequaled by anyone.

Thus he showed among numerous points that Lifton lied about the second helicopter by using the exact records Lifton had used but had grossly adulterated to make the body-snatcher thesis viable. Or, in the Stone film to take one simple single instance: Weisberg in fact was at the so-called Cuban training camp depicted in the film and had interviewed many of the figures concerned, the neighbors, and the police, etc., and had in fact actually showed Garrison's men how to get to it. [To put it mildly Garrison was too befuddled to know how to find it, even though in fact Martin spoke to many persons and to complete strangers.] It was in fact not a camp, it was an ordinary house on a building lot, in a quiet residential neighborhood. [No CIA training camp, no blow back assassin trigger men from that camp.] When Weisberg criticized that item [among scores] about to appear in the film, he was the only person in America who had the certain, irrefutable, documentary, knowledge of it and before filming Stone deliberately refused to accept it, preferring to fictionalize reality, which to my puzzled perspective seems

to be disinformative rather than clari-ficative. This is only an example, of course. Much much more exists.

From the historical long view Weisberg must be seen, it seems to me, as a Nehemiah fighting distortions of the evidentiary base.

Among other elements of his approach he insists on a factual knowledge of the facts of the assassination. Alas so many do not know them although they stand as premier authors.

In terms of disinformation I have not been able to define an instance of such acts in the work I have done--if by the term is meant the deliberate retailing of wrong information about the JFK case.

In briefest form these are part of my reasons for not wanting to tackle the subject. If you have any questions about any part I would be happy to respond or suggest paths. I do not want to add to the length of my response.

I wrote up a brief thing for ARC on the records of the Warren Commission and a citizens guide to use. Too brief really, but adequate for a starter. You recall I said I would do so. Jim has not found the time yet to publish it.

Would you be able to provide me with more information on the topic you asked me to write on? Who for example seriously proposed the subject and what basis did they or he or she have to expect a paper?

Our rain has stopped, after 10 days, and I am going to try my garden this afternoon.

Sincerely and with the best wishes for a successful conference.

David R. Wrone

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